

## Joshua 21 22:1-12 - Thursday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012

**Joshua 21:1** Then the heads of the fathers' *houses* of the Levites came near to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the heads of the fathers' *houses* of the tribes of the children of Israel. (2) And they spoke to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, "The LORD commanded through Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with their common-lands for our livestock." (3) So the children of Israel gave to the Levites from their inheritance, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their common-lands:

- Here we have recorded for us how that the Levites were to be given their own cities to live in as the priestly tribe in lieu of receiving an inheritance.
- It's interesting to note how all this came about for a number of reasons not the least of which is, the Levites were not originally to be the priests.
- God had intended for the first born of each of the twelve tribes of Israel to become the priestly line who would serve in the tabernacle and temple.

- The question becomes what changed? The answer is found in what happened at the foot of Mt. Sinai when Moses returned with the law of God.

**Exodus 32:25-28 NKJV** Now when Moses saw that the people *were* unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to *their* shame among their enemies), (26) then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever *is* on the LORD's side—*come* to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. (27) And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.' " (28) So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day.

- Because the Levites sided with the Lord and with their sword put three thousand of their own people to death, God made them the priestly tribe.

**Numbers 3:11-13 NKJV** Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: (12) "Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, (13) because all the firstborn *are* Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I *am* the LORD."

- Here's why I bring this up and point this out, the Levites avoided the consequences of a curse that was pronounced on both Levi and Simeon.

**Genesis 49:5-7 NKJV** "Simeon and Levi *are* brothers; Instruments of cruelty *are in* their dwelling place. (6) Let not my soul enter their council; Let not my honor be united to their assembly; For in their anger they slew a man, And in their self-will they hamstrung an ox. (7) Cursed *be* their anger, for *it is* fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob And scatter them in Israel.

- Simeon and Levi are cursed as "instruments of cruelty" because they had mercilessly murdered the men of Shechem in revenge for Dinah's rape.
- It's for this reason the tribe of Simeon will end up being the weakest of all the tribes numerically and only share an allotment of land with Judah.
- However, the tribe of Levi would not suffer such a fate by virtue of their taking a stand. Instead, God by His grace grants them the priesthood.

- Here's a take away from this, previous sins and failures don't have to become the final chapter in our lives sealing our fate for the rest of our lives.
- No matter how badly we've sinned in the past, we, like the Levites, can be the recipients of mercy and grace from the God of endless chances.
- There's something else here that's not so easily visible at first glance and it's something for which anyone who is called into leadership must heed.

- I'm of the belief that the reason God chose the Levites to become the priestly tribe instead of the firstborn was because they did the hard thing.
- In other words, they not only took a stand, which is hard in and of its self, they took a stand against their own brothers, which is infinitely harder.
- Anyone who's been in leadership knows that there will be those times when, as hard as it can be, you have to take a stand and do the right thing.

- Before we go on, I need to point out one more thing as it relates to the cities that were to be given to the Levites as an inheritance instead of land.

**Numbers 35:1-3 NKJV** And the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan *across from* Jericho, saying: (2) "Command the children of Israel that they give the Levites cities to dwell in from the inheritance of their possession, and you shall *also* give the Levites common-land around the cities. (3) They shall have the cities to dwell in; and their common-land shall be for their cattle, for their herds, and for all their animals.

- Here, the Lord has Moses address the matter of what the Levite's would receive as an inheritance, because they've got to live somewhere.
- Notice the other tribes were to give them cities to dwell in, and in addition to this, they were also to be given common land around the cities.
- Not only was this common land sprinkled throughout all these cities, this land needed to be suitable for both their livestock and farming.

- It's as if God wants them amongst the other tribes, and close in proximity to the other tribes, so they can have possessions as the other tribes.
- I believe that one of the reasons God has Moses do this was because it would not only benefit the Levites, it would benefit the others as well.
- In other words with the Levites living and working with them- they'd have access to them-be in fellowship with them-and ministered to by them.

- Because verses four through forty-two record the locations of these cities appointed to the Levites, we won't take the time to read through all of it.

(43) So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. (44) The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. (45) Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

- These last three verses here in chapter twenty-one, contain in them a very valuable life lesson that we would all do well to both hear and heed.
- Notice how that we're told not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel, this because all came to pass.
- This means that any failure to inherit the Promised Land was on their part, not God's. In other words, God will never fail us it's us that fail God.

**Joshua 22:1** Then Joshua called the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh, (2) and said to them: "You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you. (3) You have not left your brethren these many days, up to this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God. (4) And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brethren, as He promised them; now therefore, return and go to your tents *and* to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan.

- Here we have the record of how that the two and a half tribes are allowed to go back to their families and their land on the east side of the Jordan.
- It's worthy of noting that they had followed through on their commitment making good on their promise to enter into battle with their brethren first.
- This is a follow up of sorts to the account that we have back in the book of Numbers chapter thirty-two, where we have recorded what went down.

**Numbers 32:20-27 NKJV** Then Moses said to them: "If you do this thing, if you arm yourselves before the LORD for the war, (21) and all your armed men cross over the Jordan before the LORD until He has driven out His enemies from before Him, (22) and the land is subdued before the LORD, then afterward you may return and be blameless before the LORD and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the LORD. (23) But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out. (24) Build cities for your little ones and folds for your sheep, and do what has proceeded out of your mouth." (25) And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben spoke to Moses, saying: "Your servants will do as my lord commands. (26) Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our livestock will be there in the cities of Gilead; (27) but your servants will cross over, every man armed for war, before the LORD to battle, just as my lord says."

- Notice it's only after Moses tells them that if they don't follow through on their commitment, they will have sinned against the Lord that they agree.
- Also, notice how Moses puts the fear of God in them saying they can be sure their sin will find them out in that they'll certainly reap what they sow.
- To me, the lesson here is quite clear; our secret sin will find us out. It's not God that finds us out, it's the sin itself when ripened that finds us out.

**Galatians 6:7-8 NKJV** (7) Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. (8) For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

(5) But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul." (6) So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents.

- Before they depart, Joshua exhorts them, then blesses them, with what some believe was what's known as the Aaronic blessing in Numbers six.

**Numbers 6:24-26 NKJV** "The LORD bless you and keep you; (25) The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; (26) The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace."

- I have a couple of thoughts that I would like to share before we move on to verse seven, first as it relates to the blessing pronounced upon them.
- I believe this blessing came vis-à-vis their obedience, in the sense that there would've been no blessing had they not obeyed God's commands.
- Here's what I'm thinking, an obedient life is a blessed life, but often in our life we tie the hands of God's blessing with the ropes of disobedience.

- The second thought is related to something one commentator has suggested concerning the order of the exhortation that Joshua gives to them.
- Notice he tells them first to heed then second to love, then third to walk in obedience. The order is important because this is just how it works.
- In other words, if my obedience to God comes before my love for God, I fall into legalism, and if love comes before heeding, I'm fall into liberalism.

(7) Now to half the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given a possession in Bashan, but to the *other* half of it Joshua gave *a possession* among their brethren on this side of the Jordan, westward. And indeed, when Joshua sent them away to their tents, he blessed them, (8) and spoke to them, saying, "Return with much riches to your tents, with very much livestock, with silver, with gold, with bronze, with iron, and with very much clothing. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren." (9) So the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel at Shiloh, which *is* in the land of Canaan, to go to the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, which they had obtained according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

- I find it interesting that not only are these two and a half tribes blessed for their obedience, but so too are they prospered for their service to God.
- This is evidenced by how they're given riches of livestock, silver, gold, bronze, iron and clothing, all of which would have been extremely valuable.
- I'm of the belief that this speaks to how we give God the permission to bless and prosper us when we are walking in obedience to His commands.

(10) And when they came to the region of the Jordan which *is* in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan—a great, impressive altar.

- This great and impressive altar will actually cause serious problems such that it becomes a source of contention and division, as we'll see next.

(11) Now the children of Israel heard *someone* say, "Behold, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh have built an altar on the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan—on the children of Israel's side." (12) And when the children of Israel heard *of it*, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh to go to war against them.

- This reaction on the part of the Israelites begs the question of why it is they would gather together in order to go to war against their own brethren.
- Did the building of an altar by the two and a half tribes on the other side of the Jordan rise to the level of the Israelites waging a war with them?
- To answer that question, we need look no further than what we're told started this reaction in verse twelve where it says that they had heard of it.

- They based their declaration of war against their own brethren solely on the basis of what they had heard, giving no thought to what the truth was.
- The truth of the matter is, they did not build this altar for the worship of false gods rather, this altar was built as a testimony to the next generation.
- Is this not what happens to us when we're too quick to attack a brother or sister in Christ, solely on the basis of the rumors that we have heard?